

Australians with severe asthma to benefit from new PBS treatment options

The National Asthma Council Australia today welcomed the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) listings of tiotropium (Spiriva Respimat) and mepolizumab (Nucala) as add-on treatments for severe asthma.

Asthma is one of Australia's most common chronic long-term diseases affecting more than 1 in 10 people or around 2.4 million Australians.ⁱ It is estimated that up to 5 to 10 percent have severe asthma and may have the potential to benefit from the extended listing of Spiriva and the new listing of Nucala.ⁱⁱ

Previously the Spiriva treatment was only reimbursed for people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) but it will also be PBS reimbursed from 1 February 2017 for eligible adults who have severe asthma.

Nucala is a new treatment for very severe asthma that recently became available in Australia. It will be PBS reimbursed from 1 January 2017 for eligible patients being treated by an asthma specialist.

National Asthma Council Australia CEO, Kristine Whorlow, said that the PBS listing options were good news for those patients who struggle every day with their asthma despite being on maximal therapy.

"We welcome the increased availability of new medicines to help people with asthma. These can make a real difference to everyday life and reduce the number of serious asthma flare-ups and potential hospitalisations.

"Success in improving asthma health outcomes is not only a result of improved asthma management practices of health professionals and patients, but, importantly, access to the latest treatment options.

"Whilst most people can manage their asthma well with currently available inhaled preventer and reliever therapies, there remains a group of patients whose asthma is not well controlled by maximal doses of these medicines," said Ms. Whorlow.

"People who are concerned about their asthma should speak to their doctor," she said.

Australia has a high prevalence of asthma which is a significant cause of ill health and poor quality of life in children and adults. The recent thunderstorm asthma events in Melbourne have heightened asthma awareness nationally.

Asthma mortality rates have fallen by over 60 percent since a peak in the late 1980s. Last year 421 people died from asthma.ⁱⁱⁱ

Nucala's listing means there are now two PBS-reimbursed targeted biological therapies for very severe asthma. The PBS listing for the other treatment, omalizumab (Xolair), was extended on 1 December 2016 to include eligible children aged 6 years and over.

For more information on asthma and allergies, visit the National Asthma Council Australia website: www.nationalasthma.org.au

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PRE-RECORDED VIDEO COMMENT FROM RESPIRATORY PHYSICIAN

Video recorded comment from Dr James Robertson, respiratory physician, who will be located at Albury Base Hospital next year can be accessed at <https://spaces.hightail.com/space/2ru16>

For further information, or to arrange an interview with a National Asthma Council Australia spokesperson, please contact:

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ⁱ ABS. National Health Survey: First Results, 2014-15. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015

ⁱⁱ Chung KF et al. International ERS/ATS guidelines on definition, evaluation and treatment of severe asthma. *European Respiratory Journal* of 2014;43:323-373 3

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics. Causes of death data 2015: Customised report. National Asthma Council Australia, 2016. Available at: <https://www.nationalasthma.org.au/living-with-asthma/resources/health-professionals/reports-and-statistics/asthma-mortality-statistics>